

how NHS brand values are brought to life by NHS organisations in their words and actions and to ensure that stakeholder views are taken into account when developing the brand locally.¹³ It is more than simply communicating messages: it is an exchange between staff, service users and the wider community to ensure that the NHS brand 'lives' the values it propounds. The role of the communicator is to act as brand guardian and champion, and to act as a catalyst for change if the reality of the brand experienced is different from the brand espoused.

Leadership

It is apparent that in order for the public relations leader to act across the four levels outlined above and to undertake the roles required as specified across the four attributes, they will require organisational power and need to exercise strong leadership. This is discussed in detail in Chapter 3 on leadership and Chapter 11 on the organisational catalyst. Their place in the organisation is politically and practically important and where they are placed is a clear indicator of whether management recognises that communication is far more than the deployment of a set of communication skills and techniques. According to the Chief Executive of the National Health Service,¹⁴ communication is a core system's asset concerned with building the reputational and relationship capital of the NHS in order to promote, protect and deliver the health of the nation.

Public relations as a core organisational competence

Given the arguments articulated earlier in this chapter that public relations leaders should be engaged in equipping others with public relations skills at all levels, it is clear that responsibility for good communication does not rest on the public relations function alone. It is the responsibility not only of all managers, but all staff, in much the same way as good budgetary discipline is not just the responsibility of the finance function. Staff throughout organisations engage with customers and other stakeholders and to stakeholders staff are the embodiment of the brand.¹⁵ In conceptualising what 'Good in Public Relations' looks like, therefore, it is important for the communication function to recognise the contribution of non-specialist colleagues. The role of the public relations professional is to work with senior management on employee engagement recognising that the clearer and more engaged staff are in developing the organisation's vision and narrative,¹⁶ and the more they are active advocates and intelligence gatherers, the greater the communicative and reputational impact.

Excellence in planning, managing and evaluating public relations

The fourth DNA strand concerns how the department or individuals formally charged with public relations (the function) undertakes its programmes and campaigns. These can be reactive, that is responding to threats and opportunities

such as those sometimes posed by the media; proactive, that is implementing planned communication strategies; and/or interactive, that is engaging in dialogue through face-to-face, digital and other channels.

There are a number of well-used planning models for communication which have found wide acceptance in the practitioner community, for example those by Broom¹⁷ and Gregory.¹⁸ These are based recognisably on business planning models.¹⁹ These communication planning models emphasise the importance of research, defining objectives, identifying stakeholders, developing a strategy, selecting appropriate channels, crafting suitable content, identifying issues and risks, deciding on the resources needed and monitoring and evaluating programmes and campaigns. By managing and evaluating programmes with recognised business discipline and in an effective and efficient way, the communication function gains credibility and can demonstrate its contribution to the organisation (for more on this see Chapter 10).

Summary: the four principal roles

The four levels and four attributes together are intended to achieve a number of objectives. First to improve trust, re-enforce legitimacy and to build and defend reputation. Second, by bringing understanding of the broader societal context and the stakeholder perspective into organisations it seeks to facilitate informed decision-making at all levels. Third, to ensure that senior managers as a whole are better equipped to understand the role of public relations in building good, supportive stakeholder networks and to be a part of that skilled cadre themselves. Fourth, to ensure organisational structure, systems and processes (see Chapter 11 on the organisational catalyst) and what they offer are designed and delivered in accordance with the spirit of the brand, and that those in their value chain are

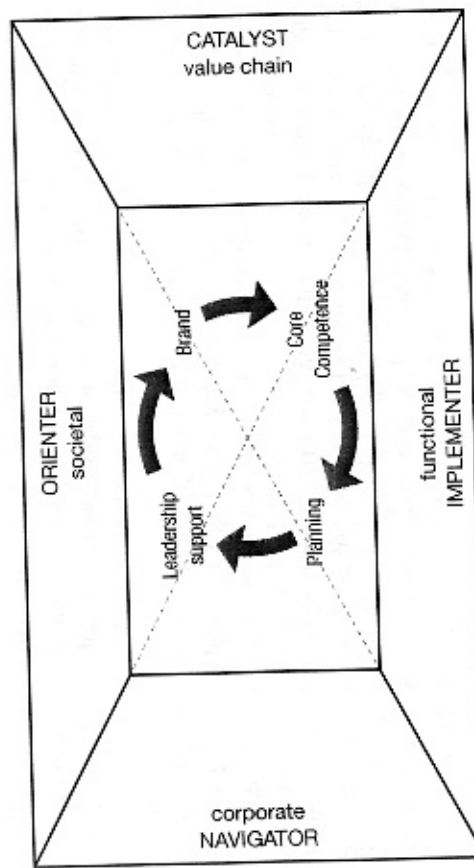


Figure 5.2 A conceptualisation of the four levels of the public relations function with the four permeating attributes